

BROOKLYN'S BENEFIT VAST

CONSOLIDATION WOULD LIGHTEN TAXPAYERS' BURDENS

AND ADD NEARLY A MILLION OF POPULATION TO THE GLORY OF THE GREATER NEW-YORK—YESTERDAY'S MEETING SHOWED THE PROJECT'S FAVOR—MR. GAYNOR'S SPEECH.

The first public meeting to consider the project for the consolidation of New-York and Brooklyn drew to the Real Estate Exchange in Brooklyn yesterday an attendance that completely filled the spacious auction room. It was a gathering composed evidently of men capable of understanding the subject and of weighing its merits.

The sentiment of the meeting, while overwhelmingly in favor of consolidation, developed a small outcropping of opinion the other way, which added interest to the proceedings by emphasizing the views in favor of union held by the great majority of Brooklyn taxpayers.

Members of the Commission of Municipal Consolidation Inquiry occupied the speakers' platform. Andrew H. Green, President of the commission; J. S. T. Stranahan, Vice President; Secretary Albert E. Henschel, Frederic W. Devoe, John L. Hamilton, Edward F. Linton, Calvert Vaux, and William D. Veeder were there in an official capacity. William J. Gaynor, Asa W. Tenny, Camden C. Dike, and Thomas C. Smith also occupied chairs on the platform.

In the audience were some of the best-known real estate owners and dealers in the city, with committees of citizens' associations from various parts of Brooklyn.

In opening the meeting Andrew H. Green said: "It is very gratifying to the Consolidation Commission to meet at this stage of the movement such numbers of the notable men of Brooklyn confirming the opinion of the Commissioners that opportunity alone was wanting to manifest the general interest in the subject that prevades this community, an interest based upon the conviction that only by the successful consummation of the scheme of union of the two cities with adjacent less populous municipalities can the highest and the most beneficent development of these areas and the interests of their people be accomplished.

"I will not attempt to enumerate or recapitulate the advantages of such union. So manifest are they that it would seem like underestimating the intelligence of the citizens of Brooklyn to repeat them. It is as unnecessary as to detain you with a demonstration that two and three put together make five.

"All those material improvements that render residence comfortable and convenient, all social and business interests, all economic, commercial, financial, and transportation facilities will be promoted by such union, to be inevitably followed by those large results that are the outcome of a sentiment of the power and greatness of a city with a population as shown by the last census but very few hundred less than 3,000,000, the second city of the world.

"Not only this, but the expenses of government of the combined areas will be reduced, useless officials dispensed with, and the amount of your heavy tax bills correspondingly diminished. That they are disproportionately large and that they can be reduced is clearly shown by the able pamphlet of Edward C. Graves, Esq., one of your citizens, who has kindly volunteered to aid the commission by a thorough investigation of this subject of taxation in Brooklyn.

"The commission to whom this subject has been committed was made up on a basis than which none could be fairer or more just to each locality concerned. Every area proposed to be united has its representatives appointed by its local authority. The Mayor of Brooklyn has given us that energetic, intelligent man of many affairs, the Hon. Edward F. Linton, and another citizen which your city has honored in responsible positions, the Hon. William D. Veeder. The State has placed among the Commissioners your first citizen, the Hon. J. S. T. Stranahan, and the State Engineer and Surveyor. All communities concerned are represented, to give expression to the views of each particular locality.

"It is proposed to form, not annex, but unite, under one administration the various municipalities about the port of New-York. It is an undertaking not only important to the localities especially concerned, but to the State and Nation. Well accomplished, it is impossible to overestimate its value upon the great, burning question of the day, the proper administration of cities, toward which population in all civilized communities all over the world is rapidly tending.

"The commission has been quietly engaged in its work for nearly three years, gathering statistics, scattering information, and preparing bills for the Legislature, which body at its last session refused to pass a bill to permit you to express your opinion by a vote on this most important measure, and strange to say this action was brought about in a Democratic Legislature by the persistent opposition of every one of the delegation in the Assembly from Brooklyn, with one exception, that of Mr. Weed, all honor to him, who manfully contended for the right of his constituents to say whether they desired consolidation.

"Opposition to this measure by those in office has long been foreseen. The commission urges upon the citizens of Brooklyn the importance of organization for the furtherance of this work. Every election district should be represented by a nucleus of activity, and the Legislature appealed to by thousands and tens of thousands to further this great undertaking.

"The Commissioners will continue to prosecute their work. They believe it worthy of their best efforts; they are encouraged by your presence. They will not deem their work done until all the proposed areas are united under one Government, and until a charter has been provided for the great city that shall reduce taxes, dispense with useless placemen, and afford ample checks upon wasteful expenditure and adequate provision for the protection and enjoyment of life and property."

Abundant applause attended Mr. Green's remarks. Manifestations of sympathy with the purpose of the meeting were redoubled when Mr. Green read a letter from State Senator Joseph Aspinall to Mr. Stranahan, in which Mr. Aspinall said it would give him great pleasure to introduce a bill for consolidation and fight for its passage in the Senate.

Mr. Green next presented Mr. Gaynor, who was warmly greeted, and said:

"The people of Brooklyn have grown tired of having it said sneeringly, not only in New-York City, but all over the country and often in Europe, that Brooklyn is the mere dormitory or bedchamber of New-York City. The saying has grown to be all the more annoying because it is just and true.

"The people of Brooklyn have been belittled by certain local conditions long enough. They now demand not only the position they are entitled to as part and parcel of the great population here at the Nation's entry gate, but also their just share of the public revenues derived from the wealth and conditions which they help to create.

"Now, inasmuch as this meeting is held at the Real Estate Exchange, I have something particular to say at the outset. It may be thought by some that this meeting is in the interest of speculators in unimproved real estate. If I thought so I would not be here. There are those here who know that I deem speculation in unimproved real estate an evil. The attaching of speculative values to vacant real estate means that the useful members of society who must buy and improve it have a greater burden cast upon them.

"I will not speak to you of the annexation (or as I would prefer to say, the 'annexion,') of Brooklyn to New-York, or of New-York to Brooklyn, as in either case I might tread on the corns or excite the prejudices of some one; but I will say at once, and as you may think bluntly, (for I believe in plain speech concerning Brooklyn, and mean to indulge in some next Fall, God willing,) I will say in a word, that I am in favor of the 'consolidation' of New-York and Brooklyn.

"I have the time now to state only a few of my reasons. Taxation in Brooklyn has reached a limit which the overburdened rentpayers and taxpayers are in no mood to have exceeded. Yet we have our Mayor glibly talking of unnecessary improvements of great cost as though he were going to pay for them himself.

"We cannot stand, and do not propose to stand, any increase of taxation in Brooklyn, either to buy a miserable water company, a few politicians or to do unnecessary public works for the sake of the few contractors who are given, by our rulers, the exclusive right to do our public works. The rentpayers and taxpayers of Brooklyn have long enough demanded in vain a relief from taxation. They have come to learn that by consolidation with New-York City their taxes would be decreased one-half and more, and they prefer to make consolidation an issue with the powers that be in Brooklyn.

"Have you ever compared taxation in Brooklyn with taxation in New-York? It may never have occurred to some of you that taxation in Brooklyn is more than double the taxation of New-York City. Well, now let us see. Let us take a house worth, say, \$10,000 in New-York City, and one worth the same amount in Brooklyn; but it matters not in the comparison whether it be worth \$1,000, \$10,000, or \$100,000, so long as we take one of equal value in each city.

"I suppose I may assume that you are all aware that improved real estate in New-York City is valued by the Assessors for the purpose of taxation at about 40 per cent. of its actual

value for ready sale. The President of the State Board of Assessors has declared it to be 40 per cent. But we need no official statement of a fact that may be easily verified by any one, and is within the actual knowledge of many. But as the argument against one's own side should always be overstated rather than understated, I will say 50 per cent., and that is the extreme.

"Now, 50 per cent. of the ten-thousand-dollar house in New-York City is \$5,000; the decimal, or rate of taxation, there, as you all know, is 1.85; the process of multiplication of the valuation by the rate gives me the tax on that New-York house as just \$92.50.

"Let us take our ten-thousand-dollar house in Brooklyn. I need not say to any rentpayer or taxpayer in Brooklyn that improved real estate here is valued by the assessors for taxation at 70 per cent. of its actual value, so your ten-thousand-dollar Brooklyn house goes down on the assessment rolls at a valuation of \$7,000. The rate of taxation here, as you probably know, is at least 2.75. It runs much higher, but I follow the rule of not understating the argument against me. If you will now multiply this valuation of \$7,000 by this rate of 2.75 you will get the tax on the Brooklyn house. It makes it just \$192.50. The tax on a ten-thousand-dollar house in New-York is \$92.50. In Brooklyn it is \$192.50, or more than double the New-York tax. [A voice, "Shame!"]

"So I say, 'Shame!'" Mr. Gaynor went on, "but the reason is not altogether in waste in Government, as some may suppose at first blush. I do not wish here to discuss the Government of Brooklyn, nor is it any part of my subject. But I beg to assign the chief reason why taxation is so much higher in Brooklyn.

"The majority of our people, the best part of them in brains, in enterprise, and in manual skill, go to New-York every working day and do business and work there. They do not work in Brooklyn; they only sleep here. The best part of the population of Brooklyn work in New-York, and they pay rents, and enhance land values, and create great corporate wealth, and vast amounts of movable property, out of which New-York collects its taxes, but from which Brooklyn derives no benefit whatever. Thus are the talents, the energies and skill of the best part of our population given wholly to New-York City and lost entirely to us.

"It is a sad thing to think of our people creating wealth for New-York City to tax, and from which we get nothing. The result is that we have substantially nothing to tax except our real estate. So my chief reason is right in this phase, without entering into any criticism concerning the manner in which our Local Government is carried on. The consolidation of the two cities would reduce taxation in Brooklyn at least one-half. I mean consolidation on equal terms—consolidation making taxation uniform in the new corporation, spreading the burden of taxation evenly over the combined area of the two cities according to values.

"Consider that one Government, with most of its entourage and retinue and all of its waste, will be done away with; consider the vast aggregate of property in New-York City; and that it alone, with a small increase of the tax rate, could raise the revenues we spend in addition to those of New-York; that land values would become healthier here, and better houses would be built for tenants, and you will see that I have understated the fact.

"I desire to say again in this connection that I do not take into account, much less advocate, the enhancement of speculative values in unimproved real estate, for there are at least a few of you who know that I am and have for years been wholly opposed to speculation in vacant real estate, and would stop it if I could. The adding of speculative values to vacant land only adds to the burden of the useful members of society who have to buy and improve it.

"I come to say things next which those of you who know me will understand in the spirit in which I say them, but which may be misconstrued elsewhere. But I believe the right way is to speak the truth frankly concerning Brooklyn's affairs. It is said that the city has a population of 1,000,000. I had not known that we had grown to such a population, but even so, I must say to you that there are several things which cannot be said in favor of a city of 1,000,000 of people which does not support even one bookstore.

"After giving some attention to the government and local conditions of cities, not only in this country, but in others, I believe that public sentiment concerning local government in Brooklyn is the lowest of any city in this country, and I believe in civilized Europe. I do not say this in any sense of discredit to the people of Brooklyn or to their intelligence. On the contrary, the reason does not lie there. As I have already reminded you, the best part of our people in enterprise, brains, and skill go to New-York every day. They have their capital invested there; they carry on business and work there; in a word, they earn their bread and the bread of their families there, and consequently and inevitably their heads and their hearts are there, and Brooklyn and her affairs are only secondary with them, if they think of them at all.

"Hence comes the low ebb of public spirit and sentiment in Brooklyn concerning local government, which is the greatest misfortune a city can suffer from.

"On the other hand, local public sentiment runs high in New-York City. We do great injustice to that city if we do not take note of the advance in good government there brought about by public sentiment. In twenty years we have seen public sentiment in New-York City impeach two Judges of her highest courts, drive others from the bench, indict many public officials from Mayor down to Aldermen; at various times convict and send to prison several officials of the highest and lowest degrees, and drive into exile and to death all over the world corrupt politicians and officials, and in the same time drive out of power or cause a change in political leadership of the dominant party, I believe, four times.

"As a striking illustration, when the Legislature last Winter passed in a hurry a bill for a speedway through the Central Park and the Governor signed it in equal haste, almost before it reached his desk, public sentiment in New-York City, manifested in only one public meeting, compelled its repeal within, I believe, ten days. Political leaders over there do not sit down in the face of public protest and say, 'Oh, never mind; it will blow over.' They have been taught too many lessons of its force. They get up and conform to it quickly. I am not sure that public sentiment is not more powerful in New-York City than in any city in the world.

"I will add only one other thought. Consolidation would lift us all up. It would do away with certain local conditions which have so long belittled us. We have here in Brooklyn merchants, mechanics, and professional men, who, for their enterprise, skill, learning, and, I venture to add, genius, are not excelled in this State. Yet they have no standing outside of Brooklyn, being localized by our peculiar conditions. They live in New-York's bedroom, and that is enough. With consolidation they will take the standing and reputation in the State and in the Nation which they are entitled to.

"When the late Sir Morell Mackenzie wrote his work on diseases of the throat he sent the proofs of it here for revision by a young specialist, born and brought up in Brooklyn. I do not know how many of you even know to whom I allude. If the same thing had happened in the case of a distinguished specialist of New-York City, the whole world would know his name.

"The last election has taught that the people of this country have come at last, and really for the first time, to think of economic subjects which are their chiefest concern, and go right down to the unit of State or city—the family—and to subjects which touch their pockets and comfort in life. This question of comparative municipal taxation which I have illustrated will have its effect, and will end in consolidation.

"The cost of maintaining Brooklyn costs five times as much per capita as the cost of maintaining Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, or London. Without reducing this comparison to the last analysis, statistics are abundant, if needed, to show that we pay too much for what we get and occupy altogether too insignificant a place for a city of our population and capabilities.

"The remedy lies in consolidation. Let us make that our municipal issue. It is not a matter on which party lines should divide us. National or State politics can cut no figure in this effort. We have here the genius, enterprise, and ability that can command recognition only by lifting ourselves to the importance as a municipality which we deserve to occupy. That can be done only by consolidation, which will knit us closer to the greater city in which our material interests, our brains, and our hearts are centered, and whose abundant prosperity we are entitled to share."

Mr. Gaynor was followed by A. W. Tenny, who drew a bright picture of the future New-York, the second city in the world, with a certainty of becoming the first, and for which he had been hoping all through his twenty-three years' residence in Brooklyn.

He recalled a remark of Mr. Beecher's that Brooklyn was nearer to New-York than New-York City, and drew radii from New-York City Hall to show how true this was. The radius of six miles, extending to One Hundredth Street in New-York, included all of Brooklyn except the new Twenty-sixth Ward; nine miles, to One Hundred and Sixtieth Street, New-York, took in all of Brooklyn, Long Island City, and Newtown. New-York extended fifteen miles from City Hall, and that radius projected over Long Island, took in all of Kings County, much of Queens, and Jamaica and Flushing Bays.

"Stranger things than this have happened," said Mr. Tenny, "and this will be done within ten years."

The new plan, Mr. Tenny went on to say, should impose upon each municipality the settlement of its own debts. It would put forever at rest all disputes over East River water-front rights. Bridges would leap the river like magic, tunnels would be built under it, and the united city would spring forward to its destiny as the greatest city on the globe in population, trade, commerce, and wealth, and in the happiness and prosperity of the people. The two cities were already the same in all substantial interests. What reason, he asked, could there be, not personal, not political, or not venal, why they should not be one in name and in law as well as in fact?

The meeting gave cordial indorsement to Mr. Tenny's views and approved with equal spirit what Thomas C. Smith of the Seventeenth Ward had to say in the same vein. This movement, Mr. Smith declared, having started, would go ahead. It would not "blow over." As an index of intelligent opinion upon the subject, Mr. Smith told of a meeting at the Seventeenth Ward Bank the other day at which the subject of consolidation came up informally. About twenty men were present. Without exception they favored consolidation and wanted it quickly. Mr. Smith hoped that committees would be appointed in each election district for the purpose of massing public sentiment and bringing about the enactment of proper measures for consolidation within twelve months. The work would not be difficult, he said, for the people were eager to express their approval of the project.

ment of proper measures for consolidation within twelve months. The work would not be difficult, he said, for the people were eager to express their approval of the project.

Mr. Green announced that further meetings would be held for the agitation of the subject. Meanwhile, organization in election districts was desirable. As the commission was without means to push this work, its success must depend on the energy of citizen volunteers. With such help assured, a vote might be hoped for at the coming session of the Legislature, so that the question might be submitted to the people at the next general election. If this were done the commission would undertake to construct a charter for the united city which, he promised, would contain many wholesome provisions.

At this stage of the proceedings, when the meeting had practically ended, the first opposition to the project appeared. It was voiced by Albert T. Walsh of the Seventeenth Ward Citizens' Association. He thought Brooklyn might be giving something for nothing by consolidation, and proceeded to quote statistics of population to show that Brooklyn had been growing much faster than New-York. The meeting speedily became impatient over this kind of argument, and the speaker resumed his seat before he had said all he wished, and in spite of appeals from Mr. Green and William D. Fox, Secretary of the Seventeenth Ward Association, that he be permitted to go on.

Copies of the pamphlet by Edward C. Graves, showing how consolidation would reduce taxes in Brooklyn one-half, were in great demand at the meeting, where they had been taken for free distribution, and armed with this strong argument and with copies of a petition to the Legislature, for signature by citizens, the gathering dispersed. It is expected that many thousand signatures will be attached to the petition before the meeting of the Legislature. The petition is as follows:

To the Honorable the Legislature of the State of New-York:

The undersigned citizens of the City of Brooklyn respectfully represent:

That as the Cities of New-York and Brooklyn are now united by a community of interest in every relation except that of political jurisdiction, they should, in their common interest, be consolidated into one municipality and their affairs conducted by a single administration.

That such union would promote the cause of good government, bring about efficiency and economy in public affairs, advance improvements upon a systematic plan, facilitate intercommunication, reduce the burdens of taxation, enhance the social and material welfare of the citizens of the consolidated city, and give to the "Greater New-York" a population of over 3,000,000, making it at once the second city, and soon, by the natural advantages of its position, the first city in the world.

The undersigned believe that it is the manifest destiny of the Cities of New-York, Brooklyn, and vicinity to become consolidated into one city; that the people of Brooklyn favor such consolidation, and that they should be permitted at an early date to give expression of their opinions by a vote on this question.

Your petitioners therefore pray that your honorable body will direct that such measures be taken as will insure the consolidation of said municipalities by submitting the question to a popular vote, or otherwise, as the wisdom of your honorable body may approve.

No time was fixed for other meetings. They will be called as circumstances may require.